

BUCEROS

ENVIS Centre on AVIAN ECOLOGY

Vol. 23, No. 1 & 2, 2018



Painting Special

ABOUT ENVIS

ENVIS (Environmental Information System) is a network of subject-specific centres located in various institutions throughout India. The focal point of the present 66 ENVIS centres in India is at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, New Delhi, which further serves as the Regional Service Centre (RSC) for INFOTERRA, the global information network of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to cater to environment information needs in the South Asian sub-region. The primary objective of all ENVIS centres is to collect, collate, store and disseminate environment related information to various user groups, including researchers, policy planners, and decision makers.

The ENVIS Centre at the Bombay Natural History Society was set up in June 1996 to serve as a source of information on Avian Ecology.

Objectives of the ENVIS Centre at BNHS

- ✍ To create a bibliographic database of published literature related to avian ecology study
- ✍ To publish and distribute BUCEROS newsletter on avian ecology to its members
- ✍ To create and upload databases on avian ecology on ENVIS website www.bnhsenvis.nic.in
- ✍ To reply to queries related to birds



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Golden Bush-robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus*
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Indian Bird Drawings

Girish Jathar and Sushmita Karmakar

Homo sapiens have been fascinated by nature and wildlife since time immemorial. The earliest depiction of wildlife dates back to 35,400 years in caves of Sulawesi in Indonesia; the animal illustrated is the Babirusa. This painting is likely to be the oldest known example of wildlife art in the world and possibly also the first pictorial impression by man.

Rock paintings have been discovered in all parts of the world, including India. These paintings are recognised under four groups symbolic, geometric, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic. Rock paintings are generally found in caves where they were protected from rain, sunlight and various other environmental factors. *Ratite* birds were among the most favourite model animals for cave paintings; the oldest known depiction of this group of birds is of *Genyornis newtoni* from Australia. In India, rock paintings of birds date back to 10,000 to 12000 years, Bhimbetka near Bhopal being the most famous site. This site has paintings of the Indian Peafowl and possibly of junglefowl.

In more recent historical times, the bird art evolved significantly during the Mughal era. Emperors such as Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan patronised this art. The most notable wildlife paintings were in the era of Akbar and Jahangir. The credit for significant examples of bird illustrations goes to the court artist and illustrator Ustad Mansur. He grew up during the reign of Jahangir and was the first to depict the Dodo and Siberian Crane in colour. He also illustrated several other bird species along with other animals and floral species.

In the British Era, the most famous name associated with bird illustrations is that of John Gould. He was an English ornithologist and bird artist. His associate Edward Lear was equally competent and most of the lithographs produced were by Lear; together, and along with the assistance of Elizabeth Gould, John Gould's wife and several other artists, they created more than 3,000 lithographs of birds and animals from Asia, Australia, and East India. His set of natural history lithographs was the finest among all sets ever made. During the era of Dr. Sálim Ali, artists J.P. Irani, Carl D'Silva, and John Henry Dick contributed immensely to illustrations of Indian birds.

This special issue of BUCEROS attempts to highlight the talent of young Indian bird artists who continue to keep this legacy alive. The illustrations featuring in this issue are based on observations or inspirations from places such as the Western Ghats, foothills of Himalayas, north-eastern India, and even the cold barren areas of the Arctic. There is also a story behind each illustration that is equally interesting and captivating. This amalgamation of story and brush strokes will certainly gain the reader's appreciations.

Happy reading!

I Paint Birds Because They Fascinate Me

Anju Panwar Rajesh's desire is to spread the message of avian conservation through her bird paintings

As the daughter of a wildlife conservationist, I often got a chance to be amidst nature. Much of my childhood was spent observing birds and other wildlife. I found watching birds a fascinating experience. I was captivated by their beauty, their small size, their sweet calls and especially their flight. My mother used to make exquisite multicolour replicas of birds in embroidery, which have left deep impressions in my mind.

As a little girl, I remember being drawn to the melodious call of Western Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*, and I would promptly imitate it. Other regular visitors around our home were Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*, Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* and Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*. As I grew older, I realised that there were far too many birds, varying in their calls, colours and sizes. I started seeking them out and observing them, always making sure I never disturbed them. This enabled me to understand their behaviour, habitats and flight patterns.

When I got a chance to visit Kanha National Park, more famously known for its Tigers, I was amazed to see the bird diversity there. I had the opportunity to observe behaviours that I had never seen before. Once we saw a Barasingha stag *Rucervus duvaucelii* grazing busily, oblivious to the four Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* that rode piggyback on it. We were informed that mynas picked up ticks from the deer's skin and helped to maintain it clean. Surely, the deer must have been only too happy to provide free ride and food! It was a perfect example of the sense of cooperation and coexistence that existed in the wildlife world.

We were riding on an elephant when we saw a Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris* on a stream bank. It seemed to be guarding the remains of its Chital *Axis axis* kill. A flock of White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* descended and

settled near the stream. They took turns to approach the kill and steal a few bites while the tiger was busy chasing the others away. We saw more vultures gliding effortlessly in the air with the help of air currents. Sharp eyesight enables them to spot a kill. These scavenging birds are nature's cleaning and recycling agents. Sadly, research indicates that their numbers in



Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*

An imposing crested pheasant of myriad colours; inhabits mid-altitude of outer Himalaya.

Feeds on root-tubers, seeds and berries, sometimes insects.



Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*

This small fishing bird looks beautiful with its blue body and a prominent white collar and breast.

It inhabits the edges of mangroves and streams amid forests. Its agility is remarkable.



Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*

An exceptionally attractive small bird, often called Navrang for its combination of colours.

Lives in pairs; its short 'keee keee' morning calls are music to the ears of birdwatchers.

India plummeted drastically in the 1990s owing to the painkiller diclofenac. When the vultures, especially *Gyps* species, fed on a carcass that had been administered diclofenac, it caused them renal failure. Though the government has banned the drug for veterinary use, researchers say the problem is far from over. They have not only found that that diclofenac is still easily available for veterinary use but also that there are other similar painkillers which are equally toxic to the vultures. Perhaps stringent conservation measures are possible only when the true worth of these vultures is recognised by the common public.

My new home in Delhi is a ground floor apartment with a lawn having a Mulberry and a Mango tree. We have also nursed a small flower garden. Bees, butterflies and birds are regular visitors to this garden. Bird visitors include parakeets, flowerpeckers, White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, babblers and House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Just outside the gate is a Persian Lilac *Melia azadirach* tree; we were delighted to see a pair of Coppersmith

Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus* nesting in its cavity. Their chick was successfully raised in our garden, much to our delight.

Painting birds makes me immensely happy. I feel a compelling passion to paint birds not merely because they are attractive but because I also feel inspired by their hard working behaviour and the dedication they display while crafting or fabricating their nests and raising their young. They are adaptive to their surroundings, be they avenue trees or city parks. I respect their ability to survive in harsh environments by adapting and evolving accordingly. But rapid urbanisation and escalating pollution levels are threatening their easy survival. It is time we took cognizance of the damages we have caused to their natural habitats and work towards restoring nature for posterity. My desire is to spread the message of avian conservation through my bird paintings. More people should know how birds contribute towards beautifying and supporting our environment, and help in restoring a balance in the ecosystem.

Impressions etched in colours

Debjyoti Karmakar narrates how painting helps him capture his best moments with birds

It was a monsoon evening of July 2016. The sky was mostly clear, barring a few scattered clouds. I was on my terrace, watching the birds. With the pond below surrounded by Siris *Albizia lebbbeck* trees, my terrace was an ideal spot to watch birds. It was an oasis amid the developing town Suri in West Bengal.

I had been hooked to birds early in life, watching and painting them, thanks to my parents who had gifted me with bird encyclopedias and my sister, who was a perfect bird-watching partner. The bird diversity

around our house was so rich that my sister and I had spent hours on the terrace watching and identifying them. Painting had even given me an opportunity to know them closely.

The monsoon evening had brought in many avian visitors. The White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* was wading at the edge of the pond. A few pigeons were displaying their aerial prowess. I was keenly watching a pair of Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* that had nested in the Siris tree, when a loud shriek 'ke-ke-ke-

ke' filled the air. It was unmistakably the call of a Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*. It flew straight into the foliage and landed on a branch of the Siris tree which had spread over the edge of the pond. The bird was about 30 centimetres in length. As it sat motionless staring into the water, I observed the beautiful greenish-blue shade on its wings, its yellow breast and underparts and the huge coral-red bill. It was a striking match of colours. I captured it on my camera but the simple 'point and shoot' device could not do justice to its minute details. The bird sat motionless for about five minutes, only occasionally tilting its head to look for prey under the water. As expected, the bird dived in, breaking the water surface and emerged with a fish in its bill. It was a good catch; the prey was slightly larger than the bird's bill. The bird thrashed the struggling fish against the branch a few times before swallowing it headfirst. Having had its fill the bird flew away, its heavy bill held straight. Not satisfied with my camera capture, I decided to paint the Kingfisher.

The next bird described here is the Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus* which was sighted on a Java plum *Syzygium cumini* tree in Indas, West Bengal, where I had gone to visit my cousins. The bird is strikingly beautiful with a shiny golden-brown back, white spots on the hind neck, a white underside



Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*



Stork-billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis capensis*



Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus*

with black striations and a bright red crown on its head. The bird visited the tree almost every morning. Its presence was often detected by the tapping sound of its bill hammering at the tree trunk. Being a secretive bird, it was difficult for me to observe it at first. Whenever I was in the view of the bird, it would go to the far-facing side of the tree trunk and completely hide from my view, but it gradually accepted my presence. It would hop around and lightly tap on the bark to find a hollow spot that was sure to have borers under the surface. Once it zeroed in on a spot, it would repeatedly strike the surface and chisel out a hole to get its prize. I was fascinated with the way it procured its food.

The next bird in this article was sighted in Jaipur, the pink city of Rajasthan. It is an interesting bird, which is commonly seen – the Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*. In July 2018, after a heavy downpour in

the afternoon, the sky was clear and the sun was out. Inside a children's park, there were puddles of water everywhere and foraging among them was a pair of Red-wattled Lapwings, prodding the soft mud with their beaks for food. They were slender bodied with light brown back, white underparts, black head and breast, a slender red beak with black tip and a patch of bright red-coloured bare skin between their bill and eyes. A very noticeable feature is their long legs which are bright yellow in colour. These birds are extremely watchful and the slightest movement or sound alerts them, and they respond by calling frantically with a piercing shrill sound and running or flying away with slow flaps to a small distance. While I was watching the birds, a dog began to move towards a dense scrub at the side of the park. This alarmed the Lapwings and they began to call frantically. It

seemed like they were nesting close by. The birds flew over the intruder and dive-bombed it. It was a show of aerial expertise. Each time the Lapwings dived at the dog, the dog would lunge at them and the birds expertly evaded the attack. One of the Lapwings then landed in front of the dog and ran towards a scrub in the opposite direction to divert the dog's attention. This went on for about 2–3 minutes until the dog retreated, tired. I was fascinated by the birds' tactics to drive away the intruder. This further developed my interest in this species.

The Indian subcontinent is richly endowed with many bird species and to observe them we do not always have to visit protected areas. The small pockets of vegetation within our cities are good enough. Safeguarding these pockets is as crucial to us as it is for the bird species; their loss will be our greatest misfortune.

Art out of image

*There are many ways to engage with the avian world
and create public awareness about them. Lenin Raj chose art*

They wake us up at the break of dawn with their sweet notes. They fill the skies in colours with their resplendent plumes. Birds form a very important aspect of this natural world. They play a crucial role in the food chain, and in the life of human beings. Many of these bird species have been pushed to the edge of existence owing to several factors, largely fueled by human development.

Birds are seen everywhere, from the dry deserts to the coldest arctic region. They are common in cities too. They have adapted themselves to every ecosystem on the earth, contributing to it in a significant measure. But if they have caught our attention, it is most often for their beauty; many aspects of the avian life still remain beyond everyday human comprehension.

A good number of birds migrate thousands of miles every year, sailing for days on seas and traversing high mountain ranges with little rest, for food and shelter. Then there are those that reside necessarily close to human habitats, having fully adapted to human activities and even living off the resources produced by humans. A major threat the bird species face is habitat loss owing to reasons such as destruction of forests; development of industries; poaching (illegal hunting of birds, capturing and trading of endemic



Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*

and vulnerable bird species); environmental pollution and over-exploitation of natural resources. While some serious steps need to be taken up to prevent the escalation

of habitat loss on a bigger scale, each one of us can make smaller efforts by creating awareness among people regarding the avian world and its ecology. There are

various ways to engage with the avian world, and create awareness among people about birds and their importance. I chose to sketch them, using photographs as my reference. I started with the more common species and then progressed to the endangered ones.

Whether common or endangered, I make sure they are scientifically correct in terms of colours of the feathers, the shape and structure. I start with the eye of the bird, which gives life to my sketch. Some of my top picks are the Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros griseus*, Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*, Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* and Malabar Crested Lark *Galerida malabarica*.

India has nine hornbill species, of which four are found in the Western Ghats. The Great Hornbill has a wide distribution range. It is about 95 to 105 cm in size, characterised by a huge yellow casque and beak, and a long white tail with a black band at three-quarters of its length. Its primary food is fruits. It also feeds on insects, lizards, snakes and small mammals. Like other birds, hornbills too play a part in developing the forest by eating fruits and dispersing the seeds in their excreta. They seek dense canopies to roost and nest.

During the breeding season, the males, in a bid to win over the female, are known to engage aggressively with each other through casque-butting in midair. A remarkable behaviour of the hornbills is that the female seals herself in a tree hole using mud and excreta, in order to lay



Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros griseus*

her eggs and tend to the hatchlings. The male plays the provider, bringing food for her and then the chicks after they hatch, which he passes on through the small slit in the nest hole. The sealed nest hole with a slit is her way of keeping the young ones safe from predators.

One of the Great Hornbill's biggest threat is the human being. It faces a decline in numbers not only because of habitat loss caused by human development,

but also hunting. It is hunted for its majestic beak and long feathers, especially in northeast India, where the hornbill parts are used as head decorations. Consistent and targeted conservation programmes by NGOs and government bodies, however, have put a check on hunting after 2000-2002. For one, there is a shift from hornbill casques to ceramic casques. The Nyishi community from northeast India, which traditionally wore the hornbill beaks as headgear,



Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus*



Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*



Malabar Crested Lark *Galerida malabarica*

is now in the forefront of protecting the birds in Arunachal Pradesh. This can be considered as the greatest achievement of a conservation effort.

Malabar Grey Hornbill is very similar to the Great Hornbill in habitat preferences and characteristics. But the casque, which is considered to be a major identity of the hornbill, is absent in the Malabar Grey Hornbill. It is present in all the other species of hornbills found in India.

And here is the jewel of the jungle – Malabar Trogon. It prefers dense forests, where it nests in the hollow of a tree stump. It feeds on insects and fruits. It is sexually dimorphic, with the male having a black head and crimson belly separated by a white band across the breast. In the female, the crimson color is replaced by rusty color. In the Nilgiris, it is found migrating to higher elevations during summer.

The Common Kingfisher, also known as the Eurasian Kingfisher and River Kingfisher, is a small kingfisher with a wide range of distribution across Eurasia and North Africa. It is a resident in India and can be very commonly found near water bodies. It is territorial, and defends its territory very vigorously. It however migrates from areas where rivers freeze in winter. It is a very tiny bird which feeds on fish and sometimes crabs, snails and lizards too. It is most active in the morning and evening. This tiny creature has special visual adaptation that enables it to see prey under water. Due to lack of food in winter, the kingfishers can suffer severe mortality leading to a population crash.

In the past, there existed an unpleasant custom where people killed the kingfisher and hung it outside their house. They believed that its beak moved in the direction of the wind.

The Malabar Lark, also called as the Malabar Crested Lark, is a species of lark found in western India. The Malabar Lark can be told apart from the others by the presence of a prominent spiky crest and relatively long and pointed beak which curves at the tip of the upper mandible. Its song is comparatively very musical and flight, relatively relaxed, with slower beats.

The five species illustrated here are enough to show how every species has its own traits and significance. Unseen to the human eye, they also impact a given habitat on which they are solely dependent. So loss of habitat would only make their existence difficult. Since the power to conserve them is also in human hands, we could start by seeking ways to engage with the avian world and draw human attention to these vulnerable winged beauties through our actions.

Painting Bird Experiences

*When the lens fail, I turn to the canvas to capture my special encounters with birds,
says Somendra Singh*

A glimpse in the undergrowth is all that one usually gets of this bird! The Golden Bush-Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus* is a notorious skulker. Very rarely does it venture out of the thickets. In all my birding years in the Himalayas, I have seen the Golden Bush-Robin out in the open only a handful of times. One such occasion was during a trek in the Neora Valley National Park. After a long climb through thickly forested hills, we reached a clearing high up on a hill. It housed the Aloo Bari camp, with a watch tower, a trekking hut and a hut for the forest department staff. The plan was to have a quick lunch before heading back.

As I walked to the hand pump to fill my water bottle, I noticed some movement inside a stack of dried branches. A flash of gold confirmed that this was a Golden Bush-Robin. I peered into the darkness to get a glimpse when the Robin flew out and alighted on a branch a few metres from me. It sat there for a few seconds before diving back into the undergrowth. I called out to the rest of my party and we sat down quietly near the hand pump. We had to only wait for a couple of minutes before the Golden Bush-Robin flew out of the undergrowth and gave us a *darshan* (audience). It came out a few more times before disappearing completely into the undergrowth.

Most people who spend time in the field, observing nature at close quarters, have many such experiences. These experiences stay with us, even after we have returned to the drudgery of our daily existence, enriching our lives immensely.

When out birding, I always keep my camera handy. It is a good tool to record interesting bird behaviour. A photograph is also useful when confirming the identity of a bird. As an added bonus, one is sometimes able to capture a magical experience in the frame and share the joy with others.

However, over the years, I have realised that being a photographer alone is not enough.

For, a photograph often has its shortcomings. It can rarely capture the essence of the experience.

But a painting has no such limitations. The creative liberty the art form lends is immense and it allows the painter to capture the experience long after the experience is over.

I had never painted in my life but that did not deter me from trying. I bought some art supplies, a few books on painting, and I started painting. The paintings in this article are the result of these attempts. Most of my paintings stem from memorable experiences of birding in remote areas. I am a little partial to the rarer birds.



Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

I still love photography and spend a lot of time with my camera. I even manage some great photographs. But these are the exceptions. When I want to share a 'magical experience' that my camera fails to capture, I turn to the canvas.

Demoiselle Cranes in the sunset.
(Acrylic on canvas 36"x48")

It was late evening. The sky was ablaze with a spectacular sunset. We were standing in the salt pans of Tal Chhapar Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan, enjoying the brilliant

colours of the sunset, before calling it a day. It was quiet all around except for the sound of the breeze.

We heard the faint call of Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* or *Kurj* as they are locally called.

The Demoiselle Cranes, indeed all cranes, have a far reaching call. The call of the Demoiselle Crane is unmistakable. It is a sad call, mournful, full of longing, and yet it reminds one of new beginnings, of lands far away.

We looked in the direction of the call. There were two of them, very far away, just black specks on the horizon. The calls grew louder as they slowly flew towards us and landed just a hundred metres in front of us. It was a once in a lifetime experience. With this painting I have tried to capture those magical moments.

Black-throated Sunbird
(Acrylic on canvas 17" x 26")

We were camping on the bank of the Hirik River during a trek to the Yordi-Rabe Supse Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh. We had saved the day for rest and recuperation after a long and hard walk the previous day. I took out my camera and binoculars, and set out to explore the area around our camp. A small stream emerged from the jungle just above our camp. I decided to walk up this stream hoping to see birds.

The stream opened into a dark and damp channel which had thick jungle on both sides. The tree canopy met over the channel, barely allowing shafts of sunlight to pierce the bottom. The channel consisted of large rocks with some sand bars



Black-throated Sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*

and a very shallow but clear stream. Small fish with orange bellies were swimming in the pools. The rocks were green with algae and moss, and were very slippery. As I slowly picked my way across, I saw some pink flowers lying on the ground. They had fallen off a creeper which had many bunches of pink tubular flowers *Agapetes griffithii*. They looked like Chinese lanterns hung in the middle of the forest.

As I stood there admiring the flowers, a male Black-throated Sunbird *Aethopyga saturata* flew in and alighted on a vine near me. I stood completely still. After inspecting me and deciding that I was not a threat, he started systematically visiting the pink flower bunches. He would fly to a bunch, choose the best flowers, poke his beak and sip nectar. He went about his business with precision and speed. It took him about three minutes to visit all the flowers, after which he retreated into the jungle.

This painting is a memento of that magical moment in the jungles of Arunachal Pradesh.

The White-spectacled warbler and the Rhododendron.
(Acrylic on canvas 13" x 14")

We were in the midst of an untouched primary forest deep inside West Bengal's Neora Valley National Park, camping in a remote dilapidated trekkers hut on the banks of the Neora River. One afternoon I decided to explore a faint path that disappeared into the forest just behind our camp.

The track went through a thick bamboo forest and then entered the



White-spectacled Warblers *Phylloscopus intermedius*

primary forest. Even in the afternoon it was quite dark, with almost no sunlight reaching the forest floor. The jungle was eerily quiet and there was no bird movement. Finally, after walking for about a kilometre, I saw some movement in the middle storey of the jungle. Two small birds were flitting about, chasing each other while calling constantly. I tried to observe them through my binoculars but without much success as the light was too poor and the birds were too fast. I decided to go closer to the birds and started walking carefully towards them. After a few steps, I realised that the birds were coming

towards me. I moved close to a large tree trunk and stood still. The birds slowly danced their way towards me. They were engrossed in their courtship ritual and took no notice of me.

Soon they were flitting about within 10 feet. I could identify the birds now, they were a pair of White-spectacled Warblers *Phylloscopus intermedius* a rarely seen species as it usually inhabits the middle storey of untouched forests. The warblers flitted and danced amongst the blossoms of a rare jungle Rhododendron *Rhododendron griffithianum* while I watched mesmerised.



Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

**The Peregrine (In the stormy sky)
(Acrylic on Canvas 28" x 34")**

During an expedition in the Arctic we got stuck in a polar storm. High winds and rough seas ensured that we could not venture out into the sea. We anchored our Trimaran, the Finval, in a small creek and patiently waited for the storm to pass.

For five days, the cold wind blew steadily from the north, bringing with it a fine drizzle and some sudden squalls of rain. We spent the days, for there were no nights, sitting in the

Trimaran watching Russian movies on a laptop.

There were some lulls in the storm and we used these to explore the surrounding countryside. Once when it stopped raining, my friend Vladimir and I went out on long a trek. We found ourselves in a secluded valley surrounded by small ravines.

As we approached the valley, we flushed a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*. It had been sitting on a freshly killed Pomarine

Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*. The Peregrine was agitated and it kept circling us even when we walked away from its kill. We looked around carefully, and sure enough we spotted a nest with three young Peregrines. The parent kept circling above us, moving effortlessly in the stormy sky. After taking down a few notes, we left the valley to the Peregrine family and made our way back to the Trimaran. This painting is an attempt to capture that meeting.

Birding with Oil Pastels

One does not always need a good camera and binocular to pursue the hobby of birdwatching Ms. Piyusha Pramod Jagtap has captured her watchings on her canvas

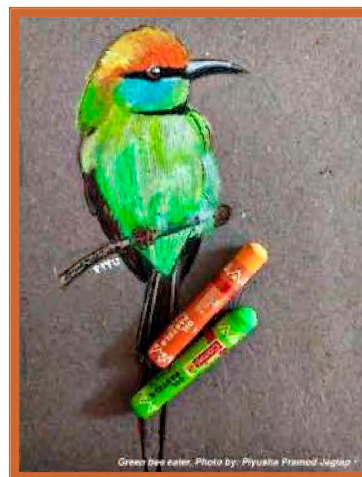
A white flicker darts across the window. My eyes quickly capture the moving frame. It is an Indian Paradise Flycatcher-*Terpsiphone paradisi* in its white avatar. Its tail sways gleefully in the air as it flies towards the small water hole in my garden. A sweltering May afternoon and thick mango canopies impart a certain flavour to the whole milieu. A nostalgic urge of bygone years, of summer vacations and papers and colours, grips

me. My hands instinctively reach out to a dusty box of oil-pastels in the cupboard. I look for a sheet or pencil but find neither. An old abandoned empty file on the shelf transforms into my canvas. With the bird-in-flight as the inspiration and oil-pastels as the medium, I begin my journey with colours. Accompanying me in this journey are a black ballpoint pen as the highlighter and a bottle of whitener as the enhancer.

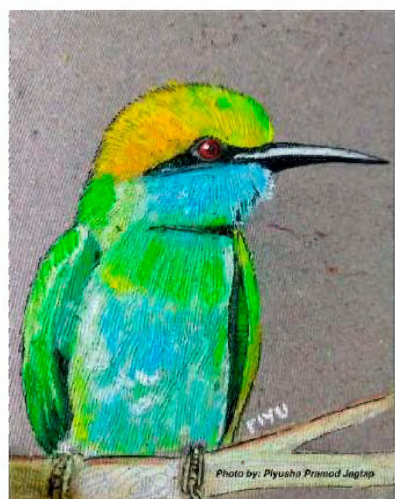


Visitors at the window...

The central Indian hilly landscapes of *Melghat*, full of dense deciduous forests, are wonderful birding stations. I was fortunate enough to live close to this region. There was nothing more I wanted than go birding in the forests. But I was in my last leg of pregnancy and had been advised rest. The only option was to be a 'window birder'. My window offered a mini-forest view, and being summer, it attracted many avian visitors. Most came for the water. A bold and beautiful Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina* was a common visitor. 'Sipahi bulbul' or Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus*, with its reddened cheeks, flitted around flaunting its crest. A variety of fantails, flycatchers and insectivorous birds came seeking the bees that hummed around the tap. Barbets never tired of calling and a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* regularly skulked in the Silver Oak hollow. My window offered an assortment of birds, and instigated me to capture them on my canvas!



Drawing birds takes you closer to their details... the anatomy, the wing patterns, different beaks, seasonal plumages, and other odds and ends. You tend to read more about them, and observe carefully.



Feathered marvels...

My canvas provided the perfect texture, and the mixing and scraping technique provided ease of working with the medium. The common visitors at my backyard became my first subjects. Later I progressed to the Himalayan beauties. The black pen and whitener gave the necessary uplift to the entire presentation. The lack of formal education in colours did not seem a disadvantage; instead it helped me pave my own approach.











My modus operandi was simple. After sketching an outline, I filled the framework with white or lemon-yellow base. The darker shades assumed over it through mixing and mashing. My homely tools – a comb, safety-pins, and even match sticks – assisted me in my endeavour. A final touch of light here and a dark there, and my painting was ready.

I hoped the joy I felt in depicting the avian beauties reached my little one in the womb. I was eager to introduce the winged wonders to my little one. After all, learning, they say, begins in the womb!

Imparting love for nature can be a sure way of getting the next generation to care for it. A kit of canvas and colours is as good as a zoom camera and binoculars to keep up this hobby. Drawing birds takes you closer to their details... the anatomy, the wing patterns, different beaks, seasonal plumages, and other minute details. You tend to read more about them, and even observe carefully. And the joy multiplies when people oblivious to birds, after seeing the paintings, exclaim, 'Oh, the only green bird we knew was parrot (mind you, not even parakeet), now we know there is something called barbet as well!' It is a bonus when your journey to personal happiness acquires a public purpose, bringing forth new birders and encouraging fresh conservation efforts. The journey never ceases.

User Forum

Different facilities for users on www.bnhsenvi.nic.in website are as follows:

-  More than 19,000 bibliographical references on Indian birds.
-  Access to informative databases developed by the Centre. Databases include Endemic birds of India, Threatened birds of India, Important Bird Areas (IBAs), Birds in CITES, Marine birds of India, and others.
-  List of other ENVIS Centres on various subject areas for navigating through information on different subjects related to environment.
-  Link to the websites and journals pertaining to Avian Ecology.
-  Kid's Centre aimed towards school-going children provides interesting facts on birds.
-  All issues of BUCEROS, the Centre's newsletter, can be downloaded in PDF format.
-  Informative PowerPoint presentations on birds available for download.
-  Glossary has more than 300 ornithological terms explained.
-  Online query facility for users.
-  Contacts of eminent experts in ornithological studies.

Request for Articles and Literature

Dear Readers,

- 1) You are welcome to contribute articles, photographs pertaining to avian ecology, to our newsletter.
- 2) To strengthen our databases we would request you to send us literature, which is not available on our website.

Feedback and Queries

You can send your feedback pertaining to our website and BUCEROS newsletter via email or through our website. Any queries related to avian ecology can also be sent to bnhs@envi.nic.in or envi@bnhs.org.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Founded in 1883 for the study of natural history, the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) is now one of the premier research and conservation organizations in the country. The Society publishes a journal, the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, devoted to natural history and also has a popular publication, Hornbill, for the layman. It has also published a number of books on wildlife and nature. Its library has a large collection of books and scientific journals on wildlife and the environment. The Society's invaluable collection of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian and insect specimens has been recognised as a National Heritage Collection.

Membership of the Society is open to individuals and institutions within India and abroad. For more details, please write to:

Membership Officer
Bombay Natural History Society,
Hornbill House,
Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road,
Mumbai 400 001. India.
Email: membership@bnhs.org
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